



African Economic History Newsletter

Issue #66 May 2025

The AEHN newsletter brings you up to date with current news and forthcoming events in African Economic History.

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If you would like to publicise your research, achievements, events, seminars or a panel for an upcoming conference, please send an email to leone.walters@uct.ac.za and I will include your news in our quarterly round-up.

Leoné Walters
on behalf of the African Economic History Network

Network updates

AEHN ANNUAL MEETING

We are excited for the upcoming **18th Annual Meeting of the African Economic History Network**, taking place on 30 – 31 October 2025, at the National University of Lesotho, Roma, Lesotho.

Preparations are well underway, and we are currently reaching out to applicants regarding the outcomes of their abstract submissions.

FRONTIERS IN AFRICAN ECONOMIC HISTORY BLOG

Frontiers in African Economic History – AEHN's blog – diffuses research-based content and promotes discussion concerning the study of long-term African development. The blog provides authors a platform to disseminate easily accessible summaries (700 words) of their recently published research (articles, book chapters, book reviews, theses), publishes interviews with key scholars in the field, and discusses relevant developments. We welcome blog contributions and suggestions. Please contact the editors (Rebecca Simson, Jeanne Cilliers and Michael Chanda Chiseni) to discuss possible posts.

Of rule, not revenue: South Sudan's fiscal past and looming crisis

Matthew Sterling Benson

This research explores how South Sudan's current looming crisis is rooted in a century-long history of coercive and predatory revenue-raising practices. Drawing on archival research and over 200 interviews, it shows how colonial, postcolonial, and rebel taxation practices prioritized control over public service, forming a 'revenue complex'. Understanding this type of fiscal history is essential—yet too often overlooked—in parts of Africa where humanitarian needs eclipse debates about state accountability and the enduring logic of predation.

AEHN WORKING PAPER SERIES

AEHN Working Papers in African Economic History are intended to disseminate research results to other scholars in order to encourage discussion and suggestions before journal publication. The papers have not undergone peer-review but published at the discretion of the Board of the AEHN. AEHN Working Papers are also available via RePEc/IDEAS. Potential working papers should be directly submitted to one of the editors: Leigh Gardner (l.a.gardner@lse.ac.uk) and Felix Meier zu Selhausen (f.p.meierzuselhausen@uu.nl).

Racial Disparities in Human Capital: Numeracy in South Africa, 1850-1980

Francisco José Marco-Gracia, Maria del Carmen Pérez-Artés and Amy Rommelspacher

South Africa represents a paradigmatic case in international literature on racial discrimination, illustrating a deeply institutionalised system that affected all aspects of daily life. Black, Coloured, and Asian populations were systematically relegated to a subordinate status compared to the dominant White minority. Drawing on direct statistical sources such as censuses and national budgets—despite certain limitations—this study explores long-term disparities through the lens of numeracy, a proxy for basic arithmetic skills. We analyse numeracy levels by race across cohorts born between the 1850s and the 1980s, with a particular focus on the Black population, given its demographic predominance. A key contribution of this research is the inclusion of province of residence as a control variable, alongside gender, birth decade, and literacy. Our results show clear and persistent gaps in numeracy by race and gender, with Black individuals and women consistently disadvantaged.

Notably, numeracy levels indicative of full numerical literacy were not attained by the Black population until the 1960s cohort, more than a century after White individuals had reached that threshold. Strikingly, we also find unexpectedly high numeracy levels in the “homelands”, suggesting a strong valuation of education by Black communities in these self-governed areas, a dynamic we refer to as “African Agency”.

German Colonialism in Africa and the Pacific, 1884-1914

Felix Meier zu Selhausen

In recent years, German colonialism has received growing public attention - a history long overshadowed by the World Wars. Due to its short-lived character, a long-term comparative view of German colonialism has not featured prominently in most accounts of European imperialism. This chapter traces the 30-year expansion of German colonialism in sub-Saharan Africa and the Pacific, with a focus on the development of foreign trade, fiscal capacity, and education. Although one of the motivations for acquiring colonies was the promise of substantial financial rewards, Germany barely profited economically from its colonies, with the exception of the Hanseatic trading firms, thus vindicating von Bismarck's initial skepticism about colonial ventures. The colonies never fulfilled their hopes serving as German population vent or supplier of tropical agricultural commodities to satisfy German industrial demand. Instead, trade with its own colonies accounted for only a negligible share of German foreign commerce, while colonial expenditures consistently exceeded fiscal revenues. Although Germany was a latecomer to colonialism, it came to possess the third-largest colonial empire in sub-Saharan Africa, with economic potential comparable to that of the British and French. In the final years of Germany's colonial empire, revenues were increasingly raised locally, and plantations, railroads, and trade were expanding—largely due to diamond discoveries in South-West Africa and the rubber boom. In this sense, German colonialism ended just as the colonies were becoming more self-sustaining and economically viable. The consequences and legacies of German colonialism varied across colonies. German rule transformed local societies through: (i) plantation economies that appropriated fertile land and relied on forced labor to cultivate tropical export crops (Cameroon and partly East Africa); (ii) trading economies in which local farmers produced crops for export with limited German investment (Togo, New Guinea and Samoa); and (iii) settler colonialism, where German settlers—facing strong local resistance—violently dispossessed the population in South-West Africa, culminating in the first genocide of the 20th century.

Elite Persistence in Africa: Historical Perspectives, State of Knowledge and the Path Forward

Rebecca Simson

In the 1960s and 1970s elite studies formed an integral part of the research agenda on newly independent African states. Commentators sought to predict the likely political and economic paths of independent African states based on the social backgrounds and political orientations of existing elites. Historians looked back in time, and debated the social continuities across the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial eras. But elite studies dropped off the research agenda in the 1980s and 1990s. This paper revisits earlier literature about elite continuity and change in Africa. It provides a broad sweep of the arguments about the origins of elites and sources of elite power across different epochs, and analyses the characteristics of the African ‘top 1%’ today using census data. It concludes by charting a research agenda that would enhance knowledge of the social origins and mobility paths of Africa's contemporary elites.

News and announcements

CALL FOR PAPERS

What Can History Teach Us About Building Resilient Economies in the 21st Century?

Stellenbosch, South Africa

29 – 30 January, 2026

Economic Research Southern Africa (ERSA), in collaboration with the Economic History Society of South Africa (EHSSA), is pleased to announce a two-day conference bringing together academics, policymakers, and subject-matter experts to explore the critical role of economic history in informing economic policy.

Conference Theme

Economic history provides essential context for understanding today's economic challenges and designing informed public policy. This conference aims to equip economists, economic historians, and policymakers with historical insights and analytical tools to produce evidence-based policy and high-quality research in economic history.

The programme will include keynote addresses, panel discussions, and academic paper presentations.

Focus Areas

The conference will explore how historical data and events can help address contemporary economic issues. Economic history draws on a diverse set of methods—including instrumental variable analysis and shocks, network analysis, and institutional analysis—and lends itself to a wide range of policy-relevant research.

Examples of relevant topics include:

- Macroeconomic uncertainty during protectionist eras
- Trade, Globalisation, and Industrial Policy (e.g. lessons from industrial policy, trade protectionism, globalisation cycles and relevance on today's trade tensions)
- Crises, Recovery, and Policy Lessons (e.g. lessons from historical crises such as hyperinflation, global financial crisis, great recession and role of policies in current African economies)
- Financial markets, income sources, and household spending
- Development and Structural Change (e.g. voter participation and political choice, colonial legacies and economic institutions, land reform in economic history, historical urbanisation and infrastructure policy; women and labour in economic history)
- Long-term impacts of shocks (weather, viral/illness, war, others...) on society
- Inequality, Labour, and Social Policy (e.g. how historical inequality shaped fiscal policy responses; past labour market policies and unemployment/wages/productivity)

Submissions on any topic in economic history with relevance to current policy are welcome.

Call for Papers

ERSA invites submissions of working papers that use historical analysis to inform current economic policy. Papers may be in draft form, but should include at least preliminary findings. Preference will be given to submissions that include explicit policy recommendations. The conference offers a valuable opportunity for researchers to receive feedback and refine their work.

- Submission deadline: 27 November 2025
- Notification of acceptance: 4 December 2025

[Submit Paper Here](#)

Funding

ERSA will cover travel, two nights' accommodation, dinner, bed, and breakfast for accepted presenters.

Contact

Organiser: Christie Swanepoel; Email: cswanepoel@uwc.ac.za; CC: fouche.venter@econrsa.org

AGRICLIOMETRICS VI

Quantitative Approaches to Rural, Agricultural and Environmental History

Economics Department, Universidad de Alcalá, Alcalá de Henares, Spain

18-19 May, 2026

The sixth AGRICLIOMETRICS conference is to be held in Alcalá de Henares, Spain, on 18-19 May, 2026. It will be organized at the Economics Department, Universidad de Alcalá, Spain, with the assistance of colleagues from the University of Zaragoza, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, New York University Abu Dhabi, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, and Universidad de la República. It is supported by the Department of Economics, by the Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism and by the University of Alcalá.

This conference aims to offer scholars working on quantitative rural, agricultural and natural resources history (and related issues) an opportunity to discuss their work in progress. We welcome papers on topics related to the use of quantitative techniques for the understanding of relevant problems in rural, agricultural and environmental history. Given the benefits arising from a cross-disciplinary dialogue, papers coming from different disciplines are particularly encouraged, especially from demographers, economists, sociologists, political scientists and historians. Papers by young scholars are especially welcome.

Anyone wishing to present a paper should send a 500 word abstract by no later than September 30th, 2025, to: miguel.martinr@uah.es. Decisions regarding acceptance will be sent out no later than November 30th, 2025. Final versions of the accepted papers are expected by no later than April 1st, 2026. They will be circulated to all participants prior to the meeting and published on the workshop website.

The scientific committee is integrated by: Francisco J. Beltrán Tapia (Norwegian University of Science and Technology), Pablo Castro (Universidad de la República), Giovanni Federico (New York University Abu Dhabi), Eva Fernández (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid), Pablo Martinelli Lasheras (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid), Vicente Pinilla (Universidad de Zaragoza), Patrick Svensson (Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences) and Henry Willebald (Universidad de la República). All correspondence should be addressed to miguel.martinr@uah.es.

WEHC REGISTRATION

Registration is still open for the 20th World Economic History Congress (WEHC), taking place in Lund, Sweden, from July 28 to August 1, 2025.

To register, visit: <https://wehc2025.org/registration/>

When registering, fees initially appear without VAT (25%), which is added at checkout. Below are the current rates:

Participants: 5,500 SEK (approx. €480)

Students: 2,800 SEK (approx. €240)

Online participation: 1,600 SEK (approx. €145)

Optional extras:

Welcome reception: 170 SEK (€15)

Congress reception: 170 SEK (€15)

Lunch (per day): 150 SEK (€13)

The final deadline to register is June 2.

OPPORTUNITIES

PhD students in Economic History **University of Gothenburg**

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The University of Gothenburg tackles society's challenges with diverse knowledge. 56 000 students and 6 600 employees make the university a large and inspiring place to work and study. Strong research and attractive study programmes attract researchers and students from around the world. With new knowledge and new perspectives, the University contributes to a better future.

2-3 PhD students in Economic History

The Department of Economy and Society at the School of Business, Economics and Law, University of Gothenburg announces 2-3 positions as PhD student located at unit of Economic History. The department conducts education and research within three different subject areas; Economic History, Human Geography, and Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Management of Intellectual Asset. The different subjects within the department create possibilities to carry out interdisciplinary education and research.

The Unit for Economic History conducts research and education within the field which includes studies economic and social development in a long-run perspective. The studies concern current topics relating to globalisation, the environment, migration and gender from the perspective of economic history. Classical issues relating to economic growth and distribution are also studied. The unit offers doctoral education as well as single-subject courses on Bachelor's and Master's level which gives the possibility to complete a

Bachelor's and Master's degree. Several of the courses are included in educational programmes at the University of Gothenburg. For further information please click [here](#).

Job assignments

The PhD student is expected to complete a PhD education in economic history during the period of employment. The main component of this education is to write a doctoral dissertation. Other tasks, including teaching and administrative duties, might be necessary to some extent, and will then render an extension of the PhD education to an equivalent degree.

Eligibility

Entry requirements for third-cycle (doctoral) programmes require both general and specific eligibility. The general entry requirements for third-cycle (doctoral) programmes are:

1. academic degree at an advanced (Master's) level, or
2. attainment of at least 240 higher education (HE) credits for courses, of which at least 60 HE credits are awarded in the second cycle, or
3. equivalent training either in Sweden or abroad.

In addition, admission to the third-cycle programme in economic history at the University of Gothenburg also requires:

1. attainment of 90 higher education credits for courses in economic history at any level, or
2. attainment of at least 30 higher education credits for courses in economic history at an advanced (second-cycle) level, or
3. achievement of equivalent training either in Sweden or abroad.

Qualified is the person who masters English in speech and writing.

Assessment

Applicants will be assessed based on the general and specific eligibility requirements and their estimated ability to benefit from the study programme.

At the assessment, documented qualifications from courses completed and theses written will be of particular importance.

Personal suitability is of great importance for this position. The ability to co-operate well is a key quality. You should be able to work independently as well as in a team.

Weight will also be given to recommendations from previous teachers or other persons with an insight into the qualifications of the applicant.

It is finally also of importance that the planned field of research is within fields for which the unit possesses competence to supervise a PhD thesis.

One of the positions require the applicant to work in the research field of business history.

Employment

The position is a temporary position of four years according to the Higher Education Ordinance with an extent of 100 %. The employment is located at the unit of Economic History, the Department of Economy and Society. First day of employment is 2025-09-01 or upon agreement.

Regulations for the evaluation of qualifications for education on a doctoral level are given in SFS 1993:100.

Only those who are admitted to third-cycle (doctoral) programmes may be employed as PhD student. Departmental work such as education, research or administrative assignments may be relevant.

A new employment is valid for maximum one year. The employment extends with maximum two years at a time. The total employment time cannot extend more than four years of doctoral education on full-time.

The university applies a local agreement regarding setting of wage rates for PhD students.

Appointment procedure

The applications will be evaluated by the research committee at the Unit for Economic History. Selection will be made among eligible applicants based on the information cited in the application, using the assessment criteria described above. Selected applicants will be called to an interview. Applicants are expected to be available for an interview on site or via videolink within two weeks after the last day of application.

For further information regarding the position

Please contact: Klas Rönnbäck, professor and responsible for PhD education in economic history, +46 31 786 45 20, klas.ronnback@gu.se .

Unions

Union representatives at the University of Gothenburg:

http://www.gu.se/english/about_the_university/job-opportunities/unionrepresentatives

Application

Please attach the following in the application:

- Personal letter (1 page)
- Short description (1-2 pages) of the applicant's goal and vision for the PhD education, and the field of research that the applicant aims to work within
- CV
- Transcript of records of first- and second-cycle studies including courses completed and grades achieved
- Copy of diploma/degree certificate
- Copy of first- and second-cycle theses/degree theses (with a translation of the abstract into English for non-English theses)
- Copy of other scientific works by the applicant that are cited in the application
- Letters of recommendation, if applicable.
- Please clearly state your social security number in the application, preferably in the CV and Cover Letter. Candidates without a Swedish social security number only need to state date of birth.

Also clearly state the reference number to the recruitment case. Make sure that any referees also include the reference number in their letter of recommendation.

In order to apply for a position at the University of Gothenburg, you have to register an account in our online recruitment system. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that the application is complete in accordance with the instructions in the job advertisement, and that it is submitted before the deadline. The selection of candidates is made on the basis of the qualifications registered in the application at the last date of application.

Closing date: 2025-05-31

The University of Gothenburg promotes equal opportunities, equality and diversity.

The University works actively to achieve a working environment with equal conditions, and values the qualities that diversity brings to its operations.

Salaries are set individually at the University.

In accordance with the National Archives of Sweden's regulations, the University must archive application documents for two years after the appointment is filled. If you request that your documents are returned, they will be returned to you once the two years have passed. Otherwise, they will be destroyed.

In connection to this recruitment, we have already decided which recruitment channels we should use. We therefore decline further contact with vendors, recruitment and staffing companies.

Economic History Working Group Research Assistant (PhD candidate, or part-time Postdoc)

Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, Tübingen University

Starting date: 1 October 2025

The length of employment is planned to be 3 years.

We are looking for a junior researcher (called “research assistant” in German universities) with a background in economics (empirical economics, economic history, or econometrics), or -- under certain conditions -- similar fields.

We expect

- previous activities/courses in economic history or strong interest to move into this field
- skills in econometrics/statistics (in addition, work experience with databases is welcome)
- experience with writing texts in economics or history (a remarkably good master thesis, for example, or a seminar thesis)
- good or very good undergraduate and graduate degree (preferably economics or economic history)
- communicative skills (intercultural experience and writing skills in English are welcome)
- strong interest in research (as indicated by a research-focused thesis, for example)

The focus is on research, although a very moderate amount of teaching and other work are also required (see below). Possible topics of your research could focus on one of our research projects. For example, one project focuses on the contribution of gender equality on long-term economic growth. New archaeological methods allow to trace this factor and to answer questions such as: when did differences between genders, say, in Eastern or Southern Europe or in India first occur? What were the causes and effects until today? We also study many research questions that have policy impact until today about numeracy, violence, inequality, social mobility and economic growth. You can specialize on any world region, for example the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, Asia, or European regions.

You will join a motivated and international research team that allows a lot of discussion about your research (for further information, please see the internet page of our group -- just google Joerg Baten). You will notice how pleasant it is to perform world-class research in a group of doctoral students and postdocs, with tutoring and advice from senior scholars if needed. For doctoral students, Tuebingen offers so-called “cumulative” doctoral work in economics, so the thesis will consist of several studies that can be partly joint work, and can be presented at workshops. Post-docs are expected to prepare the publications for a habilitation during this 3-year-period.

For working at our department, German language skills are not required, but helpful (for managing daily life). Active assistance in research and teaching (eight days of teaching per year, with a small number of students, on topics that are close to your research interests) is required at our department.

You will have funds for travelling to international conferences and the exciting experience to visit foreign countries for your research. You might also assist in writing a research grant. If this grant is approved, your gross income will double (if all legal requirements are fulfilled). Your regular presence at the department at Tuebingen University is required. Although Tuebingen is a small city (near Stuttgart), it offers a broad range of cultural, sportive and, of course, scientific opportunities.

Information about the application process

Please indicate in your letter:

A. Have you performed regression analysis using software like Stata or other software yourself?

- B. Are you familiar with IV estimation? Or are you willing to learn about it?
- C. Did you have some course in economic history or would you be open to become an economic historian?
- D. Are you able to work independently including writing texts? Please include 5 pages from your master thesis or similar.
- E. Would you like to present your research at international conferences?

Applications are to be submitted, preferably in electronic form, with the usual documents (CV; copies of degrees from high school and university; short letter of motivation) as well as a 5 page excerpt of your master thesis or similar, by June 20th, 2025 - to joerg.baten@uni-tuebingen.de.

Questions can be directed to the Prof. Dr. Jörg Baten via Email, please do not phone.

The University of Tuebingen seeks to increase the proportion of women in the field of teaching and research and therefore strongly encourages suitably qualified female scholars to apply. Disabled applicants will be preferred if they have the same qualifications as non-disabled applicants.

Contact

Professor Dr. Jörg Baten, joerg.baten@uni-tuebingen.de
University of Tübingen, Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, Department of Economic History
Melanchthonstr. 30, 72074 Tübingen

Call for Applications

Editor/Assistant Editor – Economic History of Developing Regions

ECONOMIC HISTORY OF DEVELOPING REGIONS
2025, VOL. 40, NO. 1, ii
<https://doi.org/10.1080/20780389.2025.2482476>



The Economic History of Developing Regions journal is seeking applications for the position of Editor or Assistant Editor. This is an exciting opportunity to contribute to a leading journal in the field of economic history, ensuring its continued academic excellence and impact.

Key Responsibilities:

- Overseeing the regular publication of the journal.
- Maintaining and enhancing the journal's academic and editorial standards.
- Expanding the journal's readership and promoting membership.
- Collaborating with the Editorial Board and Council to shape the journal's direction.
- (For the Managing Editor) Appointing an Assistant Editor and Editorial Board in consultation with the Council.

Term & Selection Process:

- The Managing Editor is appointed for a four-year term, renewable once.
- Applications will be reviewed by the Society's Council, which may conduct interviews with shortlisted candidates.
- The final appointment will be announced at the Annual General Meeting.

Application Process:

Interested candidates should submit a CV by 31 May 2025.
For further details or to apply, please contact kateekama@sun.ac.za.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Congratulations to

- **Lisa-Cheree Martin for obtaining her PhD in Economics**

Laboratory for the Economics of Africa's Past, Stellenbosch University

Life After Slavery: Investigations into Self-selection and Social Mobility

This dissertation investigates the experiences of formerly enslaved individuals in the Cape Colony following emancipation in 1838. Drawing on newly transcribed historical datasets, it explores their economic, social, and educational outcomes. It begins by examining the characteristics of the enslaved population at the time of emancipation, showing that valuations were closely tied to productivity-related traits. The study then explores patterns of post-emancipation migration, highlighting how settlement choices reflected both constraint and autonomy. Analysis of labour outcomes reveals that skilled former slaves, particularly artisans, earned higher wages and participated in racially integrated labour markets. Finally, it finds that former slaves' human capital influenced literacy at mission stations. The dissertation provides new insight into the legacies and persistent economic impacts of slavery and emancipation in 19th-century South Africa.



- **Munashe Chideya for obtaining his PhD in History**

Laboratory for the Economics of Africa's Past, Stellenbosch University

Private joint-stock companies and government relations in the Cape Colony, 1892-1902

Despite laws against such behaviour, civil servants and politicians in the Cape Colony invested in private joint-stock companies in the late 19th century. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, this study shows that the 1892 Cape Joint-Stock Company Act, which increased business formation across the Colony, also attracted the interest of those in government. Altogether 46 civil servants and 49 politicians invested in 62 of the 263 companies in the study sample. The findings show that politically connected firms obtained government contracts, special legislation and monopolies. The study contributes to understanding business history among government officials in the late 19th century.



New research in African economic history

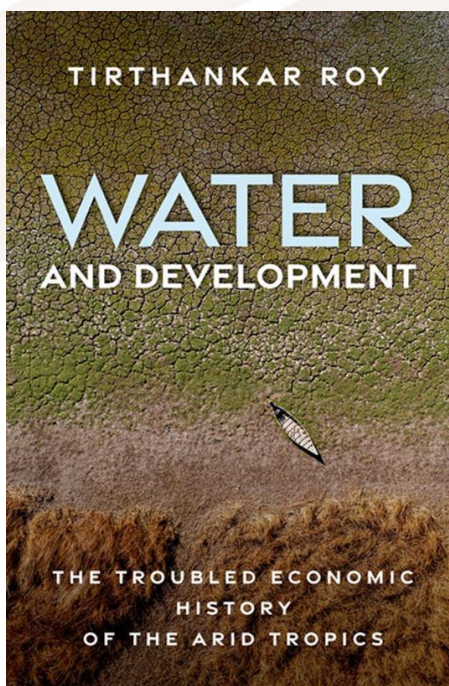
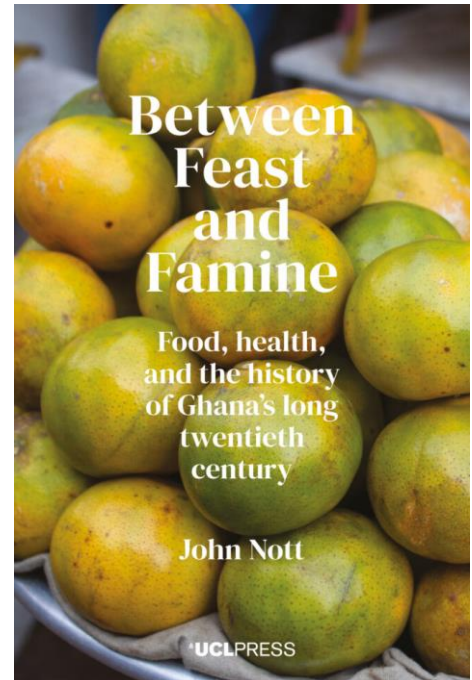
FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF

Between Feast and Famine: Food, health, and the history of Ghana's long twentieth century

John Nott

Ghana's twentieth century was one of dramatic political, economic, and environmental change. Sparked initially by the impositions of colonial rule, these transformations had significant, if rarely uniform, repercussions for the determinants of good and bad nutrition. All across this new and uneven polity, food production, domestic reproduction, gender relations, and food cultures underwent radical and rapid change. This volatile national history was matched only by the scientific instability of nutritional medicine during these same years.

Moving between the dry Northern savannah, the mineral-rich and food-secure Southern rainforest, and the youthful, ever-expanding cities, *Between Feast and Famine* is a comparative history of nutrition in Ghana since the end of the nineteenth century. At the heart of this story is an analysis of how an uneven capitalist transformation variously affected the lives of women and children. It traces the change from sporadic periods of hunger in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, through epidemics of childhood malnutrition during the twentieth century, and into emergent epidemics of diet-related non-communicable disease in the twenty-first century. Employing a novel, critical approach to historical epidemiology, John Nott argues that detailing the co-production of science and its subjects in the past is essential for understanding and improving health in the present.



Water and Development: The Troubled Economic History of the Arid Tropics

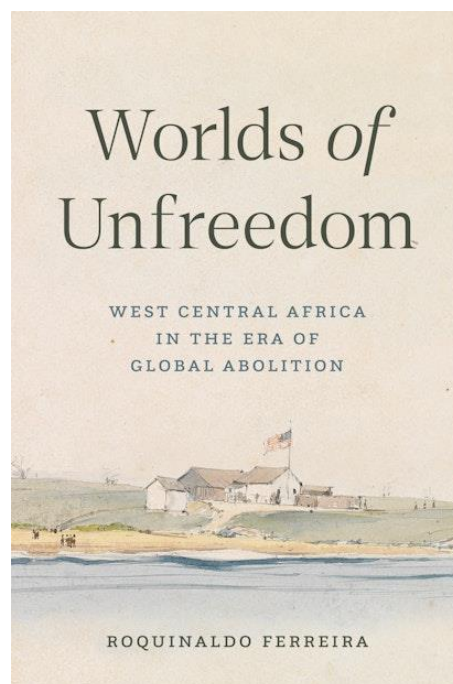
Tirthankar Roy

From the early twentieth century, a big part of the world—the arid and semi-arid tropics—began extracting, storing, and recycling vast quantities of water to sustain population growth and economic development. The idea was not a new one in this geography. It was an intrinsic part of ancient culture, statecraft, and technology. Most ancient projects, however, were local and small in scale. The capability of water extraction on a scale large enough to transform whole regions and create new cities improved in the early twentieth century, giving rise to a sharp break in the long-term population and economic growth pattern from the mid-twentieth century. Ironically, the geography of the arid tropics made transforming landscapes in this way expensive, damaging for the environment, and disputatious. The book describes this troubled history of economic emergence, building on a definition of tropicity.

Worlds of Unfreedom: West Central Africa in the Era of Global Abolition

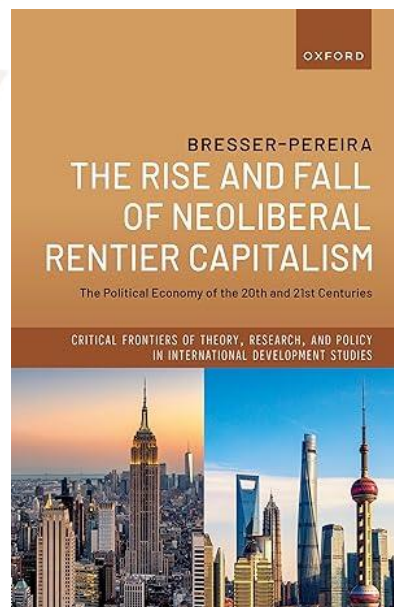
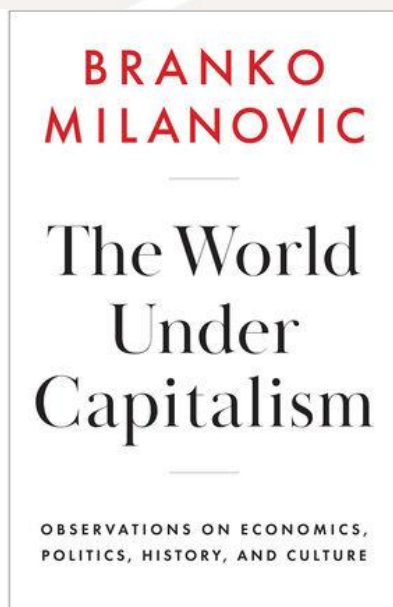
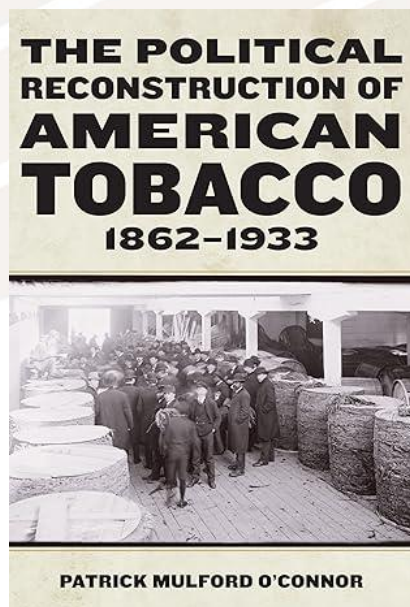
Roquinaldo Ferreira

In *Worlds of Unfreedom*, Roquinaldo Ferreira recasts West Central Africa as a key battleground in the struggle to abolish the transatlantic slave trade between the 1830s and the 1860s. Ferreira foregrounds the experiences and agency of enslaved Africans, challenging Eurocentric narratives that marginalize African participation in abolition efforts. Drawing on extensive archival research across multiple continents, he shows how enslaved people actively resisted the oppressive systems that sought to commodify their lives. Doing so, he integrates microhistorical analysis with broader world history, exploring individual trajectories to unravel complex global phenomena. *Worlds of Unfreedom* bridges a crucial gap by connecting Atlantic and Indian Ocean histories, revealing how abolitionist measures often camouflaged new forms of labor exploitation and forced migration under emerging colonial regimes.



Ferreira's analysis spans the globe, from Luanda, the kingdom of Kongo, and the Lunda Empire to Havana, Rio de Janeiro, New York City, and Réunion Island. He examines the South Atlantic as a space where politics and race-making were deeply intertwined, with ideas and identities crossing and recrossing the ocean. He considers Portugal's strategic use of abolition efforts for territorial expansion, its impact on the kingdom of Kongo, and the intricate networks linking West Central Africa to Cuba and Brazil. With *Worlds of Unfreedom*, Ferreira shows how multiple actors, including Africans, built anti-slave trade politics from the margins. His nuanced, Africa-centered perspective on abolition highlights the resilience and contributions of enslaved Africans in shaping the course of history.

Other new books in economic history



ARTICLES

Sinews of empire? The Crown Agents for the Colonies and African government debt under colonial rule

Journal of Government and Economics
Leigh Gardner and Tehreem Husain

In 1924, John Maynard Keynes complained about the fact that Southern Rhodesia, which he described as “a place somewhere in the middle of Africa”, was able to raise loans on the London market on the same terms as a large English borough. Existing literature on the “empire effect” has contended that investors did not discriminate between the bond issues of different colonies, either because they adopted similar economic and financial policies or because they were considered to be subsidiary governments to metropolitan states. However, archival records suggest that this was not the case and that African bonds were particularly unpopular. Contemporaries stressed that maintaining low borrowing costs for African colonies required considerable behind the scenes interventions by the Crown Agents using reserve funds they held on behalf of other colonies. This paper presents preliminary data on the financial connections between colonies created by this practice, which it calls the “sinews” of empire, and examines the implications for debates about imperialism and financial globalisation.

Trade costs and the integration of British West Africa in the global economy, c. 1840–1940

The Economic History Review
Federico Tadei, Nektarios Aslanidis and Oscar Martinez

Despite the essential role of trade for African economies, in the extensive literature on the historical evolution of international trade costs, Africa is still missing. In this article, we contribute to filling this gap by (1) providing the first estimates of British West Africa's trade costs with Britain c. 1840–1940 by computing relative price gaps in a representative sample of African export and European import prices, and (2) analysing the main determinants of trade costs trends, by regressing price gaps on measures of transport costs, market efficiency, and trade barriers. The results uncover a diverging pattern in African and global trade costs trends, which was not noticed in the previous literature. British West Africa experienced a reduction in its trade costs with Britain c. 1840–70, similar to the one we observe in other world areas, thanks to improvements in shipping technology and market efficiency. From the late 1870s, however, as colonial monopsonistic trading companies consolidated their control of African export markets, trade costs continued to decline in the rest of the world, but not in British West Africa. Consequently, from the late nineteenth century, trade for West Africa became relatively more expensive than for other world regions.

Firm profitability and forced wage labour in Portuguese Africa: Evidence from the Sena Sugar Estates, 1920–74

The Economic History Review
Sam Jones and Peter Gibbon

Forced wage labour (FWL) in colonial-era Portuguese Africa came to encompass a majority of working age men and persisted until the early 1960s. On the basis of reconstructed financial records from the Sena Sugar Estates in today's Mozambique, we estimate the long-run profitability of the firm. With this we associate rates of extraction from native labour, defined as the difference between actual levels of remuneration and those under counterfactual freer market conditions. We estimate that coercion suppressed workers' remuneration by about two-fifths, representing a significant cost saving to the firm. However, a production function analysis indicates that coercion also negatively affected productivity. Using these results, we calculate that the firm's profitability might have remained broadly robust without FWL. This suggests other factors, including fiscal imperatives and technological factors, likely contributed to the persistence of labour coercion in Mozambique.

African time travellers: What can we learn from 500 years of written accounts?

The Economic History Review

Edward Kerby, Alexander Moradi and Hanjo Odendaal

In this paper we study 500 years of African economic history using traveller accounts. We systematically collected 2464 unique documents, of which 855 pass language and rigorous data quality requirements. Our final corpus of texts contains more than 230 000 pages. Analysing such a corpus is an insurmountable task for traditional historians and would probably take a lifetime's work. Applying modern day computational linguistic techniques such as a structural topic model approach (STM) in combination with domain knowledge of African economic history, we analyse how first-hand accounts (topics) evolve across space and time. Apart from obvious accounts of climate, geography, and zoology, we find topics around imperialism, diplomacy, conflict, trade/commerce, health/medicine, evangelization, and many more topics of interest to scholarship. We illustrate how this novel database and text analysis can be employed in three applications (1) What views are introduced by travellers as a result of their occupational background? (2) Did the adoption of quinine as treatment and prophylaxis against malaria facilitate European expansion into Africa? (3) When and how did the diffusion of New World crops alter the African economic landscape?

“Child of Koevoet”: Counterinsurgency, Crisis, and the Rise of Private Security in South Africa

Comparative Studies in Society and History

Paul T. Clarke

Scholars of various backgrounds have noted how societies across the globe have come to rely on more and more policing and incarceration since the late 1970s. To date, however, detailed analyses of the causes and consequences of this “punitive turn” have been limited to the Global North, with the vast majority of studies focused on the expansion of states’ capacity for violence. This article offers a corrective to the global study of the punitive turn by tracing the rise of South Africa’s private security industry from its inception in the late apartheid period to its current position as one of the largest of its kind in the world. Using newspaper reports, archival material from the apartheid state’s security apparatus, and ethnographic interviews of former and current members of the security industry, it shows how counterinsurgency doctrine, civil war, and deindustrialization shaped South Africa’s punitive turn, precipitating a process where violence was devolved from the state to private actors, including local militias, vigilante groups, and private security firms. This process, it is argued, is far from anomalous, and should be seen as a paradigm for the way the post-1970s punitive turn has unfolded in the majority of the world.

Age heaping based numeracy estimates in African regions, 1950–1999: New methodological advances and results

Economic History of Developing Regions

Sarah Ferber and Jörg Baten

During the post-colonial period, enrolment and years of schooling have increased substantially in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, this has been accompanied by a decline in the overall quality of education. As a result, it is important to focus on indicators such as numeracy and literacy, capturing the quality of education, rather than the input of schooling alone, to better understand educational attainment. Moreover, these skills have been associated, for example, to higher productivity and health. Numeracy, in particular, has been linked to sustained development. Therefore, measuring and understanding its development is a crucial first step to improve educational quality. Combining data from censuses and household surveys, we estimate numeracy at the subnational level for Sub-Saharan Africa employing the ABCC Index. Additionally, we carefully evaluate the suitability of the index and our data to capture basic numeracy – deeming it to be robust. We find mostly stagnating numeracy for the birth cohorts between 1950 and 1990, although some countries increased (for example, Ghana) and others declined. Moreover, we observe strong regional differences, with Southern Africa performing best and Western Africa worst.

The wife is the mother of the husband”: Marriage, Crisis, and (Re)Generation in Botswana’s Pandemic Times

Comparative Studies in Society and History
Koreen M. Reece

Forty years into Botswana’s AIDS epidemic, amidst persistently low rates of marriage across southern Africa, an unexpected uptick in weddings appears to be afoot. Young people orphaned in the worst years of the epidemic are crafting creative paths to marriage where—and perhaps because—their parents could not. Taking the lead of a pastor’s assertion that the wife is mother of her husband, I suggest these conjugal creativities turn on an understanding of marriage as an intergenerational relationship. Casting marriage in intergenerational terms is an act of ethical (re)imagination that creates experimental possibilities for reworking personhood, pasts, and futures in ways that respond closely to the specific crises and loss the AIDS epidemic brought to Botswana. This experimentation is highly unpredictable and may reproduce the crisis and loss to which it responds; the multivalences of marriage-as-motherhood can be sources of failure and violence, as well as innovation and life. But it also recuperates and reorients intergenerational relationships, retrospectively and prospectively, regenerating persons and relations, in time. While different crises might invite different sorts of ethical re-imagination, marriage gives us a novel perspective on how people live with, and through, times of crisis. And marriage emerges as a crucial if often overlooked practice by which social change is not only managed but sought and produced.

A social network analysis of family and community conflicts in post-civil war Mozambique

World Development
Victor Igreja, Francisco Aparecido Rodrigues and Alexandre Santos Cristino

The existing literature on post-civil war processes has inadequately addressed the diversity of challenges of social reconstruction and community development arising from the fragmentation of cultural practices informing the creation and maintenance of family and social networks, and a variety of locally specific risks impacting the lives of survivors and subsequent generations. This paper addresses this gap by empirically investigating how unresolved legacies of Mozambique’s civil war (1976–1992) have fueled a network of local problems in the Gorongosa district. We used network analysis of cases presented in community courts over a decade (2002–2012) to reveal the existence of entrenched disputes involving spouses, divorce cases, domestic violence incidents, financial debts, accusations of wartime violations, and a range of adverse wellbeing outcomes. The conflicts and relationship dynamics vary in intensity over time but remain closely linked to civil war-induced risks, such as disrupted practices of premature marriages and interpersonal mistrust. Taking together these results reinforce the need to address disrupted patterns of family relations, lingering accusations of wartime violations, and to enhance the capacity of local community institutions and courts as part of social reconstruction efforts and development goals.

“Sodabi Calamity Number One”: The Production of Palm Alcohol in Dahomey and its Repression, 1840–1975

The Journal of African History
Giovanni Tonolo

This article traces the history of the repression of palm wine and alcohol (sodabi) in Dahomey, now Benin, with varying degrees of intensity, from the nineteenth-century kingdom of Abomey to postcolonial Dahomey. In parallel with the repression, this article also looks at the history of palm alcohol production. Dahomeans learned to distil wine from French peasants during the First World War, and were driven into sodabi production by French economic policies during the Great Depression. Using court sources, this article describes the social organisation, gender division, and economic rationale of sodabi production, as well as the occasions on which it was drunk. Ultimately, it argues that the repression of sodabi made it more difficult for peasants to improve their living conditions.

Africans Championed Free Trade: Violence, Sovereignty, and Competition in the Era of Atlantic Slave Trade

The Journal of African History
Ana Lucia Araujo

This article examines the central role of West Central Africa in the development of a global capitalist economy during the eighteenth century. Using a rich and overlooked set of records in English, Portuguese, and French, the article explains that rulers and brokers on the Loango coast championed ideas and practices of free trade and free markets from the rise of the Atlantic slave trade through at least until the end of the eighteenth century. The article shows that European slave traders opposed a free market by fiercely competing to obtain full control of the trade in African captives along the Atlantic Africa. In contrast, the West Central African states of Ngoyo, Kakongo, and Loango, located north of the Congo River, fully embraced free trade and free markets during the era of the Atlantic slave trade.

Manly Machines and Homely Objects: Gender, Development and Divergent Radio Technologies in Late-Colonial Ghana and Zambia

The Journal of African History
Peter Brooke

This article offers the first gendered history of African radio audiences. It uses a comparative approach to demonstrate that colonial development projects in Ghana and Zambia successfully created mass African audiences for radio between the 1930s and 1950s, at a time when most radio sets on the continent were owned by white settlers. However the gendered impact of the projects was uneven. In Zambia the promotion of battery-operated wirelasses inadvertently created a male-dominated audience, while the construction of a wired rediffusion system in Ghana attracted equal numbers of male and female listeners. Ghana's radio project offers new perspectives on the history of colonial development as a very rare example of a scheme that benefitted women as much as men. Differences in the voice of Ghanaian and Zambian radio also reveal that these early radio schemes had a lasting influence on broadcast content and listening culture in both countries beyond the 1950s.

Developmental Dictatorship in East Asia as Model for Africa? The Era Park Chung-hee in South Korea (1963–1979) in Comparison to the Era Paul Kagame in Rwanda (2000–Today)

South African Journal of Economics
Ralph Wrobel

Rwanda is among the fastest-growing economies in Sub-Saharan Africa, often discussed in the context of a 'development state'. This paper examines whether Rwanda can be classified as a 'developmental dictatorship', a term closely associated with South Korea. It compares Rwanda's development under Paul Kagame (2000–2024) with South Korea's under Park Chung-hee (1963–1979). Although both countries share similarities in their developmental preconditions and the motivations of their leaders, their policies differ significantly. Park Chung-hee focused on industrialization through Five-Year Plans, whereas Kagame emphasizes creating favourable business conditions. Consequently, South Korea has achieved significant wealth, whereas Rwanda remains a Less Developed Country, though both exemplify successful 'developmental dictatorships'.

Introduction

Gareth Austin

This special issue examines the transition from commodity currencies, such as cowries and gold dust, to colonial currencies, in West Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This introduction presents the six research articles that follow in the context of the longer-term history of currencies in West Africa, and of the existing historiography of the currency transition. It highlights the historical significance of the change from an era of currencies which operated in a manner primarily determined by African merchants and markets, to the colonial currency regimes, within which, in each case, a fiat (token) currency linked to that of the imperial metropolis became the sole legal tender. Finally, it offers a critical reflection from West African history on the theoretical concept of “commodity currencies.”

War, Finance, and Monetary Reform in Ashanti, 1807-1935

Kofi Adjepong-Boateng

Gold dust was introduced as legal tender in Ashanti during Osei Tutu's reign, which ended around 1712. During the nineteenth century, gold dust ran short in Ashanti principally because of the changing nature of trade between Ashanti and the British and due to mismanagement under Asantehene Kofi Kakari (1867-1874). The article asks why the Asante did not introduce coinage during this period to conserve bullion, even though they were familiar with the use of coins and had the skills and technology to produce coinage. This article starts in 1807, when the British ban of the transatlantic slave trade took place, impacting Ashanti's money supply. The analysis ends in 1935, by which time the coinage managed by British colonial administration was in general use.

The French Invasion of the Upper Senegal River and Payment Issues, 1880-1900: Currency Transitions and the Role of the Treasury

Toyomu Masaki

This study examines how French colonizers struggled to make payments in their newly conquered territories in the Upper Senegal River and the solutions that they attempted. Facing a shortage of payment methods, the colonizers initially brought cotton cloth, which already circulated as money among locals. However, the nature of cotton cloth required complicated management and caused conflicts between stakeholders, leading to increased incentives to replace it with silver coins. However, coins were still heavier than bills and were in short supply. Alternatively, the newly introduced drafts on the treasury began to function as a new form of payment and credit, eliminating the need to move specie. Meanwhile, the imposition of tax payments in French franc coins promoted the diffusion of the colonial currency. The research emphasizes that the treasury played a significant role in the money supply in French West Africa and highlights the importance of the payment perspective when considering money.

Crossing Borders, Counting Coins: Taxation and Multiple Currencies at the Haute Volta/Gold Coast Border in the Early Twentieth Century

Domenico Cristofaro and Seiji Nakao

Colonial boundaries exerted a significant influence on African monetary practices, particularly in border areas. The role of taxation, which often varied among different colonies, in shaping these practices remains less clear, especially when colonial borders divided economically homogeneous regions. This article, focusing on the Ghana/Burkina Faso border in the early twentieth century, examines the consequences of diverging fiscal policies on African monetary practices. It investigates colonial monetary policies, taxation, and the cross-border flow of currencies, illustrating how African traders devised monetary circuits through the manipulation of cowries and different colonial currencies. Drawing on the findings of archival research in both francophone and anglophone

countries, the article demonstrates that colonial currencies vied with one another and displayed notable dynamism, shaped by the fiscal policies of different colonial powers and political-territorial divisions. Moreover, it shows that people upheld the use of cowries as a buffer currency between two different fiscal regimes and two different colonial currencies.

Crises and Adaptation: The Colonial Currency System in Lagos and Its Hinterland, ca. 1900-1930

Ayodeji Olukoju

This article examines the transition from precolonial to colonial currencies, and responses by the government, commercial banks, expatriate and indigenous traders, and the indigenous population in Nigeria between 1900 and 1930. It considers the subject in the contexts of trade and imperialism, global warfare, commercial cycles (boom and bust), debates about the suitability of various metals (aluminum, copper, nickel, and silver), the politics of seigniorage between the imperial and colonial governments, occasional currency scarcities, counterfeiting and infiltration of French coins, and cultural views of money which informed African inhabitants' responses to the vicissitudes of colonial currencies. Varying responses in Lagos and its hinterlands included distrust of disfigured and worn coin, rejection and discounting of currency notes, and hoarding and smelting of silver coin. This article highlights and explains different forms of African agency and adaptation in the colonial political economy.

Trade and Money in British West Africa, 1912-1970: Evidence from Seasonal Cycles

Leigh A. Gardner

A long-standing debate in Africa's economic history is the speed with which the introduction of colonial currency changed the monetary systems in use on the continent. On the one hand, this introduction saw the gradual decline of indigenous currencies such as cowries and manilas. On the other, the persistence of such currencies suggests that a system of multiple currencies was maintained for some time after the beginning of colonial rule. This article uses new data on seasonal fluctuations in the circulation of official currencies in West Africa to argue that they were largely used for the purchase of cash crops and imports. Demand for these currencies was thus driven by their use as the medium of exchange in international trade. Such limited adoption of colonial currencies reflected both the motivations behind their introduction as well as Africans' limited access to financial services.

The Colonial Currency Transition: A View from East Africa

Karin Pallaver

The colonial currency transition in East Africa presents important parallels with that in West Africa, but at the same time it is also distinctive in some respects. East and West Africa presented important institutional and economic differences at the time of the establishment of colonial rule, particularly in terms of state centralization and participation in the global economy. By drawing parallels between East and West Africa, this article is a comparative reflection on the articles of the special issue "Currency Transition in West Africa: From Commodity to Colonial Currencies". It focuses on five main themes, each of which is related to the topics discussed in the articles that form the special issue: 1) the role of the precolonial states in the adoption and circulation of money; 2) the materiality of colonial money; 3) the limited reach of the colonial state; 4) frontier zones as sites of currency multiplicity; 5) the seasonality of currency circulation.

WORKING PAPERS

Varieties of insecurity and rebel–civilian ties across time: Evidence from post-war Zimbabwe

Shelley Liu

Literature on rebel governance has examined various ways in which rebels engage with civilians, build informal governing institutions, and exert social control during civil war. When rebels win, how does rebel governance affect post-war politics? This paper explores how varieties of insecurity that the victor faces after war—external threat, internal challengers, or electoral politics—explain the role of rebel–civilian ties in helping the new ruling party to successfully consolidate power. I examine forty years of rebel government rule in Zimbabwe, where the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriot Front (ZANU-PF) faced different threats at different points in time from its wartime rivals, ex-combatants, and opposition parties. ZANU-PF's strategies to eliminate these threats illustrate how rebel governance and rebel–civilian ties affect post-war politics differently based on ruling party constraints.

Gendered Impacts of Colonial Education: the Role of Access and Norms Transmission in French Morocco

Amelie Allegre, Oana Borcan and Christa Brunnschweiler

We examine colonial-era primary education as a determinant of modern-day attainment and gender disparities in education. We construct a novel dataset from the French Protectorate in Morocco, combining archival data on colonial school locations in 1931 and 1954 with the most recent Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data in arbitrary grids. We analyse the influence of colonial schools on the probability of attaining primary and secondary education in 2004. Overall, schools dedicated to Moroccans in 1931 exhibit a persistent positive impact on education outcomes, but only in the absence of nearby schools reserved for Europeans. Stark gender gaps in access during the Protectorate were narrowed in places with schools for Jewish Moroccans. These had a positive impact on girls' contemporary levels of education, but a negative impact on the enrolment for boys following the dismantling of Jewish communities after 1948. DHS measures of preferences for female education point to a social norms transmission mechanism between Jewish and Muslim Moroccan communities.

How Is Fertility Behavior in Africa Different?

Claus C. Pörtner

Sub-Saharan Africa's fertility decline has progressed much slower than elsewhere. However, there is still substantial disagreement about why, partly because four leading potential causes—cultural norms, expected offspring mortality, land access, and school quality—are challenging to measure. I use large-scale woman-level data to infer what role each explanation plays in fertility differences between Sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia, South Asia, and Latin America, based on estimations of fertility outcomes by region, cohort, area of residence, and grade level. I show that the differences in fertility between Sub-Saharan Africa and the other regions first increase and then decrease with years of education. For women without education, fertility rates in Sub-Saharan Africa are comparable to those in Latin America. Similarly, for women with secondary education or higher, fertility rates in Sub-Saharan Africa align with those in South and East Asia. There are substantial and statistically significant differences for women with some primary education for all three comparison regions. The differences are more pronounced for children ever born than for surviving children. Overall, the results suggest that offspring mortality and the lower quality of primary schooling are the dominant reasons why fertility decline in Sub-Saharan Africa lags behind other regions.

Auction records, consumer culture and social networks in the Cape Colony, 1701-1825

Johan Fourie, Helena Liebenberg, Jonathan Schoots and Paul van der Linde

By the early nineteenth century, the Cape had evolved from a small VOC outpost into a sprawling colony of over 100,000 square miles, integrated into global trade and migration networks. Its population included colonial officials, European settlers, enslaved people and indigenous groups, but everyday life in this society remains underexplored in the economic history literature. This article draws on a newly digitised source, the auction records (vendurole) of the Cape Orphan Chamber from 1701 to 1825, to analyse patterns of kinship and material culture. As records of estate sales, these data reveal who bought what, and at what price, offering rare insight into household possessions and social networks. The article shows how these auctions can deepen our understanding of the economic and social fabric of life at the Cape.

The price of status: Findings from Cape auctions

Johan Fourie, Tessa Hubble and Jonathan Schoots

In early modern societies, auctions were a means not only of allocating goods but of revealing who held power and who aspired to it. This paper investigates the relationship between social hierarchy and price formation at estate auctions held in the Cape Colony between 1700 and 1825. Drawing on a newly digitised dataset comprising nearly 50,000 transactions from more than 1,400 auctions administered by the Orphan Chamber, we examine how formal status shaped bidding behaviour. The results show that social groups differed systematically in their willingness to pay for particular categories of goods. Militia officers consistently paid premiums for oxen, while Company officials and high-status free burghers were more likely to pay above-market prices for enslaved men and women. These group-specific preferences suggest that auctions functioned in part as arenas for the display of social status, with different goods serving as signals for different segments of colonial society. We also document a robust first-lot premium: items auctioned early in the order of sale fetched significantly higher prices. However, we find no evidence that elite status was associated with a greater likelihood of bidding early. These findings contribute to wider debates on the role of market institutions in reproducing social hierarchies.

From business centres to hustle kingdoms: historical perspectives on innovative models of deviant education

Suleman Lazarus and Adebayo Benedict Soares

The article pioneers the examination of “hustle kingdoms”: illegal cybercrime training academies in West Africa. It explores these entities as innovative and adaptive institutions that emerge in response to systemic socio-economic strain. This article provides a unique analysis of hustle kingdoms by situating their emergence within the region’s socio-economic, cultural and technological trajectories. It does so by assessing the contemporary manifestation of these cybercrime academies with history in mind to understand the past that created them. It highlights how these cybercrime training academies have evolved from earlier forms, thereby showcasing a unique form of deviant innovation. It contributes to existing literature by addressing the critical gap in the scholarly discourse surrounding these entities and their historical evolution. Drawing on Merton’s strain theory, this historical scholarly endeavour examines how systemic barriers to education and employment have fostered deviant innovation, transforming hustle kingdoms from early fraud enterprises into sophisticated, global cybercrime networks. The analysis highlights the structural disparities that sustain their operations by juxtaposing these academies with conventional educational frameworks. The findings offer novel insights into the intersection of inequality, cultural narratives and technological adaptation, positioning hustle kingdoms as both products and catalysts of systemic strain.

Paths to the Periphery

James A. Robinson

My research suggests that world inequality is explained by the incidence of extractive and inclusive institutions. But why do some countries have extractive institutions? I distinguish between two main reasons; first, power relations; second, the “normative order.” Normative orders provide justifications and legitimacy for institutions which may not generate prosperity, but may achieve other goals. These distinctions are critical because they create very different challenges in trying to make institutions more inclusive and create prosperity. I show how countries move from the economic periphery as a consequence of changing both. My own intellectual journey has been in the other direction, however, hence the title of the paper: I was fortunate to be born in Britain, but I have had to unlearn much of my own experience, socialization and training in order to see other societies on their own terms. That’s crucial to be able to help them, but also to learn from them.

Colonial Persistence

James Fenske, Bishnupriya Gupta and Anwesh Mukhopadhyay

We review the present-day impacts of colonial rule on former colonies. Persistence exists because of multiple equilibria, path dependence, institutions, culture, knowledge, and technology. Empirical work in this literature primarily uses tools from applied econometrics, though best practices are needed to overcome the limitations of these tools. Colonial interventions relating to institutions, infrastructure, land, forced labour, the slave trade, and human capital all have measurable impacts in the present. And yet many colonial interventions have failed to persist or have led to reversals. These cases are informative about why colonial rule still matters, as are cases where precolonial influences have had persistent impacts despite, or even because of, colonial rule.

Neoliberalism’s True Heirs What Late-Apartheid South Africa Can Teach Us About the Contemporary Far Right

Elizabeth Soer

How can we make sense of the resurgence of the far right across the world? From the re-election of Donald Trump to the flourishing of Hindu nationalism under Narendra Modi, right-wing politicians have undoubtedly grown in prominence over the last decade. There is a burgeoning literature on this topic as scholars attempt to understand whether it is a backlash against neoliberalism, a reactionary form of neoliberalism, or simply a cultural phenomenon produced by increased global connectivity. This paper contributes to the vibrant discussion by examining an ideal yet overlooked case of ethno-nationalist neoliberalism – apartheid South Africa in the 1980s. This case reveals neoliberalism’s relationship to colonialism and its contribution to the perpetuation of white rule. South Africa has served as a test case for neoliberal ideas about race and economics and can thus contribute broader insights on the topic. The paper argues that the contemporary far right is not a backlash against neoliberalism, but a robust continuation of it. It draws on a vast range of archival sources from the late-apartheid period as well as the writings of prominent neoliberal thinkers to support this argument.

Evidence from the dead: new estimates of wealth inequality based on the distribution of estates

Facundo Alvaredo, Yonatan Berman and Salvatore Morelli

This paper examines the estimation of the distribution of wealth using estates left at death. We establish formal conditions for implementing a simplified version of the classic estate multiplier method, relying solely on minimal information about estates and mortality. These conditions are empirically validated, and the simplified approach is applied to produce new long-run top wealth share series for Belgium, Japan, and South Africa, where estate data have previously been underutilized. This method holds potential for expanding the range of countries and years in which wealth concentration can be estimated, especially where estate data exist but the standard method with heterogeneous multipliers is inapplicable.

Gendered Impacts of Colonial Education: The Role of Access and Norms Transmission in French Morocco

Amélie Allegre, Oana Borcan, Christa Brunnschweiler

We examine colonial-era primary education as a determinant of modern-day attainment and gender disparities in education. We construct a novel dataset from the French Protectorate in Morocco, combining archival data on colonial school locations in 1931 and 1954 with the most recent Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data in arbitrary grids. We analyse the influence of colonial schools on the probability of attaining primary and secondary education in 2004. Overall, schools dedicated to Moroccans in 1931 exhibit a persistent positive impact on education outcomes, but only in the absence of nearby schools reserved for Europeans. Stark gender gaps in access during the Protectorate were narrowed in places with schools for Jewish Moroccans. These had a positive impact on girls' contemporary levels of education, but a negative impact on the enrolment for boys following the dismantling of Jewish communities after 1948. DHS measures of preferences for female education point to a social norms transmission mechanism between Jewish and Muslim Moroccan communities.